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Bureau of Public Personnel Administration

The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration...

Washington, D.C.

1923

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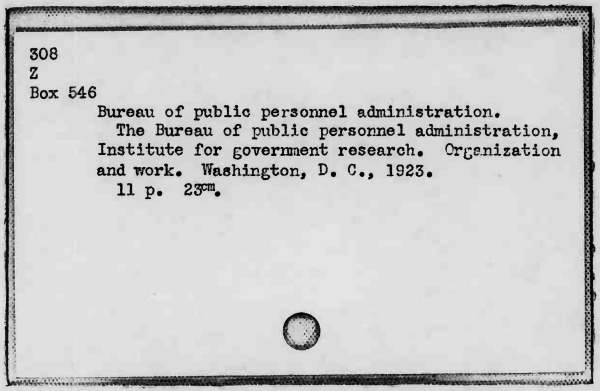

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THE BUREAU OF PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

ORGANIZATION AND WORK

308
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Box 546

26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C.
January 1, 1923

PURPOSES AND WORK

OF THE

BUREAU OF PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration is an organization established through the efforts of civil service administrators to serve civil service commissions. It is independently supported, and has no official connection with any federal, state, county, municipal, or other government body. Its purposes are:

1. To serve as a clearing house for existing information regarding matters relating to personnel administration in the public service, national, state, county, and local.

2. To develop and improve methods of personnel administration through the conduct of original investigations and experiments.

3. To publish the results of the work in such form as experience may demonstrate to be most effective for the improvement of the personnel adminstration of the public service.

In realizing these purposes, the Bureau will work to the fullest extent in cooperation with civil service commissions. In every case, however, its services will be given only upon request from commissions desiring them. No attempt will be made to impress its notions of personnel administration upon any commission.

THE BUREAU OF PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

ORGANIZATION AND WORK

26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C.
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INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE

THE BUREAU OF PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

ORGANIZATION AND WORK

26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C.
January 1, 1923

THE BUREAU OF PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

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THE ORGANIZATION AND WORK

OF THE

BUREAU OF PUBLIC PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

Establishment and Purposes

The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration was established October 1, 1922, as the result of a movement originating at the meeting of the Assembly of Civil Service Commissions held at Rochester in 1919. Exchanges of experiences at meetings of civil service administrators and others had developed the fact that civil service commissions, acting independently, often attacked *de novo* some problem worked out successfully in other juridictions, that no individual commission had any adequate facilities for finding out what other commissions were doing, and that a vast improvement in civil service administration might be expected to result if the best practices developed independently by the commissions with facilities for study and experiment were put into effect generally. It was recognized, however, that if an organization were established it should not merely assemble and disseminate information regarding current civil service practice but should also make studies for the purpose of improving existing methods, particularly of testing applicants for positions in the public service.

Before the Bureau of Public Personnel Administration was finally established its purposes, by common consent of those interested, were formulated as follows:

1. To serve as a clearing house for existing information relating to personnel administration in the public service, national, state, county, and local.

2. To develop and improve methods of personnel administration through the conduct of original investigations and experiments.

3. To publish the results of its work in such form as experience may demonstrate to be most effective for the improvement of the personnel administration of the public service.

Control and Support

The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration is administered by the Institute for Government Research with the advice and cooperation of an Advisory Board representing the various groups most interested in public personnel administration. The membership of the Advisory Board as at present constituted is given on page 2, and includes two members representative of the Assembly of Civil Service Commissions,

one of the United States Civil Service Commission, one of the National Civil Service Reform League, and one of the National Research Council.

The functions of the Advisory Board are, as the name implies, advisory rather than administrative. Its principal functions are:

(1) To give general advice regarding all activities of the Bureau.

(2) Specifically to pass upon and approve or reject all proposals for new projects or activities.

(3) To review in manuscript any formal report or publication with sufficient negative power to prevent the printing of material of which the Board as a Board does not approve and with adequate provision to enable individuals to secure the recording of their personal point of view on controversial matters.

(4) To approve or reject the nominations of the Director of the Institute for Government Research for the regular full time staff of the Bureau.

The Director of the Institute for Government Research also serves as Director of the Bureau. The offices of the Bureau are in the quarters of the Institute at 26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C. These and other close relations make it unnecessary for the Bureau to take on heavy overhead expenses and at the same time enable it to take advantage of the library, the fund of information, and other resources of the Institute. The Bureau, moreover, has the privilege of calling upon the Institute's staff and clerical force for temporary services and of using all the facilities at the Institute's command. In a word, this arrangement gives the Bureau the benefits of a well established organization's counsel, experience, and facilities, without cost in time and money.

Both the Bureau and the Institute are privately (though separately) supported. A private citizen interested in civic progress has contributed to the Bureau $25,000 a year for a period of three years with no conditions as to its expenditure except that it be used in the study and solution of public personnel problems under the form of organization described above. Neither the Bureau nor the Institute has any official connection with any federal, state, county, municipal, or other government body.

Staff

In selecting its staff, necessarily small, the Bureau has followed the plan of choosing those who are already familiar with the problems encountered in civil service administration and who, because of their knowledge and experience, may be relied upon, with the cooperation from civil service administrators which may reasonably be expected, to make real contributions in working out the solution of pressing problems. Following are brief accounts of the members of the senior staff:

1. Fred Telford: Mr. Telford was for eighteen months in 1913, 1914, and 1915 Assistant Examiner for the Illinois State Civil Service

Commission and since then he has been almost continuously engaged in civil service work. He has had important parts in the classification and salary standardization work carried on by the United States and Canadian governments, the state of Maryland, and the cities of Montreal, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. He had a principal part in launching the new civil service commissions in Montreal, Baltimore, and Maryland; his work included the preparation of rules and office regulations, the designing of forms, the establishment of filing and record keeping systems, assistance in selecting the regular staff and in holding the early tests, and consulting service for some months after the new commissions were operating. He has also done considerable work in the offices of the civil service commissions of Canada and Philadelphia. His work has made him familiar with the laws, rules, and to a considerable extent the staff, operating procedure, and problems of most of the civil service commissions of the United States and Canada.

2. Dr. L. L. Thurstone: As head of the Department of Education and Applied Psychology in the Carnegie Institute of Technology and in other capacities Mr. Thurstone has had wide experience in applying the principles of psychology to the problems of personnel administration in the public service and in industry. He has given psychological tests to more than 100,000 college students and to more than 40,000 office, clerical, factory, and other industrial workers. During the war he assisted in developing the army trade tests. Later he developed for civil service and industrial use a set of clerical tests to determine the capacity and skill of applicants for clerical positions. Recently he made a study in Detroit of the qualification requirements for various classes of police officers and of tests which may be used to determine the extent to which applicants and officers possess these qualifications. He has also done a great deal of work involving a wide knowledge of statistical theory and practice.

3. Lewis Meriam: Mr. Meriam, who is also on the staff of the Institute, will give only part time to the Bureau's activities. Through his work as an administrative officer in the Census Bureau, the Children's Bureau, and the Shipping Board, as well as with the Joint Congressional Commission on the Reclassification of Salaries and with the United States Civil Service Commission, he is well qualified to give assistance with any studies involving knowledge of conditions in the federal service, the purposes, technique, and results of classification, or the collection and analysis of statistics.

From time to time, as the nature of the work demands, other qualified persons may be added to the Bureau's staff temporarily or permanently to carry on or assist with particular studies.

Policies of the Bureau

The Advisory Board has adopted the following policies to govern the work of the Bureau of Public Personnel Administration:

1. Field of Activities: The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration will, as far as its facilities permit and circumstances make advisable, undertake work directly or indirectly concerned with the improvement of public personnel administration in the United States, Canada, and Cuba.

2. Nature of Work: The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration will undertake:

(*a*) To secure detailed information with regard to the governing laws and the rules, duties, organization, tests, forms, records, operating procedure, and costs of federal, state, provincial, county, municipal, and park civil service commissions or other public personnel bodies and, as far as practicable, make such information available to civil service officers and employees either in answer to specific requests or in form for general distribution.

(*b*) To act as consultants, upon request, to officers and employees of civil service commissions with regard to problems of organization or administration.

(*c*) To give assistance upon request to public officials, to administrative officers, to organizations, and to individuals interested in extending or strengthening the merit system; in the case of reorganized or newly established commissions, such assistance may include aid in securing and training employees, preparing rules and office regulations, and establishing modern tests, forms, records, and operating procedure.

(*d*) To carry on, either with its own facilities or in cooperation with one or more civil service commissions, experimental and research work for the purpose of discovering means of bettering public personnel administration; such work may include basic legislation, operating rules and regulations, classification of positions, establishment of compensation rates and schedules, methods of selecting employees for entrance and promotion, and training and regulating employees. Assistance to one or more commissions in making the improved methods a part of their current practice and the publication of worth while results will be considered a normal part of the Bureau's experimental and research work.

(*e*) To prepare and distribute literature calculated to assist civil service administrators in the better handling of their work or to inform the general public of the methods and benefits of the merit system.

3. Limitations on Work: The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration will not undertake to carry on for any civil service commission its regular routine work or to carry through or supervise an extensive piece of occasional work, such as a classification of positions or a standardization of salaries, unless in the opinion of the Director of the Institute and with the approval of the Advisory Board such work is advisable and arrangements are made for reimbursing the Bureau for the time and expenses of staff members assigned. The Bureau will not, at any given time, undertake projects which require any substantial part of the total time of the staff members and are of direct interest and benefit only to federal civil service commissions.

4. Charges for Work: The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration will neither request nor receive compensation, direct or indirect, for any services it may render but may, when the Director of the Institute for Government Research approves, be reimbursed for expenditures actually made as follows:

(*a*) The actual cost (including the usual distributing charges) of publications furnished on request.

(*b*) Actual traveling and subsistence expenses of a staff member incurred in visiting a civil service commission, at its request, for the purpose of studying its organization or procedure and giving advice or assistance on problems of interest only to that commission.

(*c*) Actual payments for the time and expenses of staff members assigned, at the request of any civil service commission, to give assistance with its routine work or an occasional piece of work where the results are of substantial interest and benefit only to the commission concerned.

Methods of Work

As the Bureau is organized to give different kinds of service, the methods used will vary accordingly. In order that it may first of all serve as a clearing house of existing information, the Bureau will attempt to secure from federal, state, provincial, county, and city civil service commissions up to date copies of reports, laws, rules, office regulations, forms, tests, and other matter, to file such material so that it is available for use, and to maintain it currently; in addition members of the senior staff will, to the fullest possible extent, visit the offices of civil service commissions to gain a better insight into their organization and procedure. Any of the information collected will be available for the use of any civil service commission upon request.

In addition, the Bureau will undertake, either alone or in cooperation with civil service commissions which are interested, the study of a number of problems where there is apparent need of improvement in existing methods and reasonable hope of success. In selecting definite studies the Bureau will give consideration to a number of factors, such as the likelihood of securing cooperation from civil service commissions in carrying on the work, the probability of working out worth while improvements, the ease with which an improvement, if worked out, may be adopted by civil service commissions and made a part of their current practice, the number of commissions interested in the subject and

likely to take advantage of the results of the study, and the importance of the subject in relation to the whole problem of civil service administration.

Obviously some of the research studies will involve considerable statistical work; this is particularly true of investigations to determine the value of various kinds of tests. For example, the same test will be given to two groups, one with high service (efficiency) ratings and one with low service (efficiency) ratings; if the test shows a considerable difference in the scores of the two groups, this will be evidence that it has differentiating value. Or the test whose worth is to be determined will be given to a group of employees recently appointed and the ratings filed for future reference. After a year (or some other period) has passed the service (efficiency) ratings of the appointees will be obtained and compared with the ratings made in the test. If the correspondence between the ratings obtained and the service (efficiency) ratings is closer than the correspondence between the ratings obtained by the former civil service test and the service (efficiency) ratings, the new test may be fairly considered as an improvement.

Proposed Studies

Some of the studies to be undertaken as the facilities of the Bureau permit and the cooperation of civil service commissions can be secured are as follows:

1. Clearing House Service: The first work of the Bureau obviously must be to analyze and digest the material furnished by civil service commissions in order that it may, when requested, furnish civil service administrators with information as to the rules, forms, tests, and procedure of other commissions. Some requests, it is anticipated, will require little or no study but merely involve the gathering, and transmitting of easily ascertained information; others undoubtedly will involve considerable correspondence and more or less investigation. In all likelihood the number of requests regarding certain subjects will be great enough to justify the publication of a pamphlet showing the existing practice of commissions doing successful work.

2. Civil Service Laws and Practice: As a basis for much of its other work, the Bureau will undertake the preparation of a book setting forth the principal provisions of existing city, county, state, and federal civil service laws, of the results obtained under these laws, and of the experience accumulated in the forty years since the first civil service laws were enacted in the United States.

3. The Classification of Positions in the Public Service: Owing to the fact that in most services comprising more than a few hundred positions some sort of grouping of positions for purposes of selecting and compensating employes has been worked out, and owing to the fact that

such a grouping is a prerequisite to a high degree of effectiveness in civil service administration, a publication will be prepared setting forth the principal features of existing classifications and the manner in which they work out in practice.

4. Tests and Training Course for Patrolman and Fireman: Considerable divergence of opinion exists as to the type of men most desirable for the police and fire services, as to the best methods of securing the very best class of applicants and selecting the best qualified type, and as to the manner of training those selected and assigning them to definite posts. The Bureau will undertake a study to discover the best existing practice and to describe it in such manner that any civil service commission or any police or fire department can take advantage of what others are doing. In addition, an independent study will be made for the purpose of improving some phases of the work now admitted not to be fully satisfactory; in particular, the aim will be to discover the extent to which intelligence tests may be developed to supplement or in part to replace tests now in use.

5. Tests for Skilled Trade Positions: Because of the number and variety of skilled trade positions in city, county, state, or federal services, the tests which must be given require either a large examining staff or the use of many special boards of expert examiners. The work done during the war and since indicates that very satisfactory tests may be prepared, held, and rated without the employment of numerous special boards and without any increase in the number of expert examiners on the regular staff of the commission. The Bureau will attempt to develop such skilled trade tests suitable for civil service use.

6. Clerical Tests of Junior Clerk Type: An attempt will be made to formulate in a form for use by civil service commissions a series of suitable tests for applicants for clerical positions in which little or no experience may reasonably be assumed. Particular attention will be given to the working out of intelligence and other tests in terms of strictly clerical subject matter and to reduce to a minimum the amount of work involved in preparing, holding, and rating effective tests.

7. Tests for Stenographers and Typists: A number of civil service commissions working more or less independently have accumulated a considerable fund of information with regard to the kind of material to be used in tests for stenographer and typist, the rates of speed at which dictation ought to be given and the notes transcribed, the standards of accuracy which ought to be observed, and the conditions under which the tests should be held so as to secure the best results. To the extent that the commissions will supply the Bureau with the information they have accumulated, it will be analyzed, compared, and made available in such form that any civil service commission can take advantage of the experience of the group. If necessary, additional studies will be made in

cooperation with civil service commissions to remove uncertainty where the prevailing practice varies considerably or where there may be insufficient data available.

8. Tests for Library Positions: Conditions seem to be auspicious for bringing about the cooperation of professional librarians and civil service commissions in standardizing tests for library positions. The Bureau will attempt to bring about this cooperation and, if it can be secured, will undertake any of the detail work necessary to embody in written form the joint contributions of librarians and civil service administrators.

9. Field for Intelligence Tests and Objective Methods: As far as is known no thorough study has been made to define the possibilities and limitations of intelligence tests in selecting public employees. Likewise no thorough study has been made of the extent to which the objective methods that have been developed and used by psychologists (that is, methods which place the emphasis upon fact statements and eliminate wholly or in part the factor of judgment in rating answers or persons) may be employed by civil service commissions to reduce the amount of the clerical work involved in preparing questions and rating answers and to minimize the expense involved in manifolding test papers even where intelligence and other psychological tests have no place. Studies of this kind will be undertaken and the results published in pamphlet or other form.

10. Equivalent of High School and College Education: Certain occupations require high school graduation or the equivalent while others require college graduation or its equivalent. The determining of these equivalents without reference to profssional and technical courses is necessarily a difficult matter. Some persons with superior mentality, as is well known, through their reading and experience have the same mental maturity as is ordinarily acquired through high school and college training. Others who have had the formal educational courses fail to show the mental maturity which might reasonably be expected from their training. A study will be undertaken to determine whether tests can be worked out which, without reference to any particular school subject, will be such as to show that persons taking them either do or do not possess a certain degree of mental maturity.

11. Manuals of Organization and Procedure: In the course of its work with civil service commissions, and also as a result of formal studies, the Bureau will probably accumulate a good deal of information as to civil service practice which may possibly be formulated and issued in the form of manuals. Among the subjects to be covered may be mentioned rules, files, forms, statistical reports, personnel records, the handling of routine operations (such as certifications, the checking of applications, and the preparation of eligible lists), unit costs, the number and

kinds of positions needed to handle a given volume of civil service work satisfactorily, and the relations of the examining and clerical staffs.

12. Service (Efficiency) Rating Systems: At present there is general dissatisfaction with systems of service (efficiency) ratings in use. The subject, however, is always a live one because such ratings are essential to the proper handling of salary increases and decreases, promotions, reductions in force, reductions in rank, and removals. If the opportunity presents itself, the Bureau will be ready to the extent that its facilities permit to assist one or more civil service commissions in any study of service (efficiency) ratings which promises to result in some contribution to the fund of information on the subject.

13. Training for Public Employees: For some years there has been discussion of the establishment of college training courses for those expecting to enter the public service and also of the training which ought to be given employees after they enter the service; in both fields something has been done. The Bureau will make an analysis of the situation for the purpose of discovering possibilities and limitations in federal, state, county, and municipal services and to bring together the information regarding successful achievements.

14. Bulletins and Monographs: It is expected that a number of monographs and other publications will be prepared setting forth in compact form the best practice that has been developed by civil service administrators or others who have made studies in particular fields. The following subjects illustrate the kind of publications which probably will be found useful:

1. The principles, purposes, and technique of oral tests.
2. Graphical methods of determining the value of tests.
3. The stencil method of rating test papers.
4. The preparation and use of picture trade tests.
5. The preparation and use of performance trade tests.
6. The key-word principle in oral tests.

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